

The University of North Carolina  
at Greensboro

JACKSON LIBRARY



CQ

no. 953

Gift of Donald A. Maxwell, Jr.

COLLEGE COLLECTION

PERSPECTIVES OF PERCEPTION

11

by  
Donald A. Maxwell, Jr.

111

A Thesis Submitted to  
the Faculty of the Graduate School at  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirement for the Degree  
Master of Fine Arts

Greensboro  
1972

Approved by

*Fred Chappell*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Thesis Adviser

MAXWELL, DONALD ARTHUR JR. Perspectives of Perception. (1972)  
Directed by: Fred Davis Chappell. Pp. 63

In this, our age of Higher Education, we have learned that the universe is a function of energy and mass and time. But knowledge of astrophysics makes little difference to most of us mortals because fundamentally we do exactly as our most distant ancestors did: we are born, we hunger, exult, imagine, remember, we are mistaken, we die. The universe that matters, as far as our own lives are concerned, is a perceived universe, whose laws have always been dimly felt and darkly understood.

This thesis is about perceptions. The first four parts of it--a poem, a story, another poem, and the beginning of a novel--are figmental; the last part, which is absolutely factual, is a proem, not to this thesis, but to everything else.

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following committee  
of the Faculty of the Graduate School at The University of North  
Carolina at Greensboro.

Thesis Adviser

Fred Chappell

Oral Examination  
Committee Members

Fred Chappell

Robert Watson

Stan Gregory

April 18, 1972

Date of Examination

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Fred Chappell and Robert Watson for a lot of things, not the least of which is that they try to raise their students up, not put them down; Joan Gregory for her gracious support and her example as an artist; Tom Kirby-Smith for encouraging me; Carol Maxwell for everything; and a raccoon in Okemos, Michigan, for getting me started on all this.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ALL BABIES . . . . .	1
THE ART GALLERY STANCE . . . . .	2
SIDEREAL SLEIGHT OF HAND . . . . .	10
EVEN BEFORE THE DRAGON WELL. . . . .	11
HOW TO BE A SKEPTIC: A Pose Proem . . . . .	63

413045

## ALL BABIES

All babies, when they first come through  
From their world to this,  
Are coloured a fine purple or royal blue.

But in the space of a breath or two,  
Transmigration complete,  
They begin to look like me and you.



## THE ART GALLERY STANCE

Have you ever been to the Guggenheim Museum, in New York? The first time I went there I misread my map and got off the bus a block too soon--the way you do when you're never quite sure of where you are or what the bus is going to do next. As soon as I got down on the sidewalk I knew I'd made a mistake. I felt as though everyone could see that I wasn't a New Yorker. By tilting up my glasses I could see the top of the Guggenheim sticking out a bit from the apartment houses that faced Central Park. I was pretty sure it was the museum because I'd read about it being shaped like an inverted beehive, and all the other buildings looked to be straight up and down.

By the time I finally got there I was so tired and sweaty that I almost didn't go in. I'd been to every museum in the city that week and it didn't seem that one more would make any difference at all. I couldn't tell one painting from another any more, I'd seen so many of them. I guess it was the shape of the building that finally made me go inside--I glanced up at it and from where I stood on the sidewalk it seemed to be leaning over me, drawing me inward. It was cool inside, and the air was so dry that I almost expected to see steam coming out of my suit. I wandered around on the main floor for a while, looking at some of the sculpture they had standing there, and then went up a few steps to a higher level where the picture gallery begins. The paintings were all very modern abstractions, the kind you're supposed to feel as much as figure out.



From all the museum-going I'd been doing that week I had picked up the art gallery stance, where you stand a discreet distance from the picture, with your hands clasped behind you, tilting your head to one side or the other, and being very serious. I stood around like that for a while, until something about one of the paintings struck me as funny. It was an abstract, like all the others, a bare canvas with a streak of red running down it. There were some pieces of torn newspaper stuck in the paint--headlines like MURDER and BOMB and RAPE. Everyone seemed to be taking it very seriously, as though it revealed some mystery of the universe. But suddenly--I don't know why--I got the impression that it was some kind of secret joke on the museum-goer. Maybe it was all those people being so serious that set me off, or the air conditioning--anyway, what I did was to stand there and snicker to myself. I sidled over to the next picture and it seemed to be a joke, too, so I snickered some more.

I strolled around for a little while, looking at the pictures and also at some of the people there, feeling a bit superior because I could see what a fraud the whole exhibition was. Most of the other people were obviously from out of town--it's usually fairly easy to tell because they're neither really dressed up nor really casual. The native New Yorkers usually seem to dress at one extreme or the other.

After a while I noticed that there was one other person who seemed to be amused by the pictures. I took her to be a New Yorker because, besides seeing through the pictures, she was dressed in the most casual way--a short-sleeved white blouse and one of those circle skirts that school

girls used to wear. She had on plain brown leather sandals, too, and no stockings. She was standing in front of a painting that I hadn't gotten to yet, so I went around behind her to look at it--and at her, too--from the other side. At that point the gallery turns into a ramp that spirals all the way around the building several times, up to the top, so that after I had passed the girl I was actually standing slightly above her, looking back down the slope. I snickered quietly at the picture and she passed me, going on up to the next one.

The Guggenheim has an interesting way of presenting pictures. Because the floor of the gallery slopes, it would look peculiar to hang the pictures directly on the wall, so instead they're fastened to the ends of horizontal pipes that stick out a foot or so. From the side you can see how they're supported, but from in front they give the illusion of floating in the air. They're not framed, so that all you can see is the isolated canvas.

I didn't know it at the time, but you can take an elevator directly to the top and then just walk down. Apparently, most everyone else knew about it because this girl and I were just about the only people going up the ramp. Everybody else was coming down. First I would pass her and snicker at a picture, and then she would pass me. She didn't really laugh, but she did smile a lot. When we got to the top we each looked over the edge and down at the wide main floor and at the people down there. On the outside, the building grows larger toward the top; but inside, the spiral of the gallery gets smaller, so that by leaning over the rail you can look back underneath yourself. After a

while we each started back down the ramp. It's actually a pretty good way to see the pictures--walking up and then back down, instead of taking the elevator one way--because you get a better perspective of them. You can stop and look at the interesting ones again, with the whole exhibition in mind.

That's what I tried to tell myself, though the truth was that I was more interested in the girl than in the art. I had decided that she must live in an apartment somewhere in the city, maybe in the Village, and that she was undoubtedly a student. She was probably an art student. And judging by her reaction to the pictures--the way she saw through them--she was obviously independent: a free spirit. Whatever she was, I couldn't help taking an interest in her, since we had followed each other all the way up the ramp and had been amused by the same paintings. All the way down I kept trying to figure out a way to start a conversation with her. I was getting more and more nervous about it as we wound our way down to the bottom because I didn't want to make a fool of myself and yet I did want to talk to her. It's hard enough to speak to a strange girl without knowing that she laughs in museums.

Just as we were approaching the lower end of the gallery I turned around--I was ahead of her at that point--and said something desperate to her.

"That yellow one wasn't too bad, was it?"

Of course I was expecting the cold shoulder--or worse--so I could hardly comprehend what happened next. When I blurted at her she looked puzzled, but she smiled and said what I later figured out was, "Comment?"

I was stunned. I sort of stood around, trying to catch on to myself and figure out what to do next. She just looked at me for what must have been quite a while and then said, "Pardon, I do not speak very well English."

At first I was sure she was making fun of me, but eventually it sank in that she really was French and honestly hadn't understood. I said, "Do you like that yellow picture?"

She said, "Yes, I like. I like also the blue."

We walked a bit in the museum and then went outside. It was still hot, though the afternoon was just about over. In fact, the rush hour traffic had already begun and the sidewalks were crowded even in that part of town. I asked where she was going and she pointed to the left, downtown. I said that I was going that way, too, and she smiled at me. We crossed the street to the bus stop, but the busses were so packed that several went by without even slowing up. Finally one did stop, but there were so many people aboard that we decided to buy some ice cream from one of the Good Humor men, instead. We sat on a bench just inside the park, eating the ice cream and talking.

It really wasn't much of a conversation. The only French I knew was that question everyone learns in junior high school, and she had picked up only a little English. She'd been traveling around the country by bus all summer and was on her way home. Her boat left the next day.

Once she asked me, "Do you live in New York from your birth?" I had to laugh at that. I told her, "No, I'm only visiting a friend for a few days. But in the museum I thought you were a New Yorker." She

thought that was really funny and we both laughed about it. We decided we should explore the city together. I asked her what she hadn't seen and she said the Empire State Building. She pronounced it "umpire." The way she said it made me feel wonderful--partly because of her accent, but also because it made me think of a giant referee watching over the city.

We walked all the way there, through the park as far as it went and then along the street, and by the time we got to Rockefeller Center we were both tired and hungry. It was dinner time by then, so I suggested that we eat at the restaurant in Rockefeller plaza. I knew it'd be expensive--but I didn't care. We went in and ate and talked for a long time and looked into each other's eyes. We ordered steak and salad and O'Brien potatoes. She thought it was funny that O'Brien potatoes turned out to be just boiled potatoes with some butter and parsley on top.

I tried to talk her into staying a few more days, but she said that she had to get home on time, that her parents were expecting her. I said, "Write them air mail and say that you'll come on a later ship."

She shook her head. "I am to be marry."

I could hardly believe her. I had already seen myself marrying her and living happily ever after--I even knew what our house looked like--so I started trying to talk her out of it. She listened to me go on for a long time--she just smiled at me. I tried everything. Finally I asked what her fiance was like and she said, "Really, I do not know. I see him only a few time. The marriage is arrange from many year."

"Arranged? But that's not right. You should choose, yourself." All she did was to shrug her shoulders. I tried to convince her all the way to the "Umpire" State Building, but she would only smile at me and shake her head. "It is arrange."

It was almost dark when we got up to the observation deck. We went outside and leaned on the wall, looking out through the wrought iron fence they have there to keep people from trying to jump off. You could see the whole island, up past the dark park and down to the Statue of Liberty.

I started to point out the places and buildings I recognized and she would follow my arm when I pointed, squinting into the dusk. Once I asked her if she could see the Statue of Liberty and she said, "No, I have lost my eyeglass."

I said, "Don't you have another pair?" And she said, "Yes, at my home. But it is very difficult for to mail it when I am travel." I asked when she had lost them and she said, "In Ohio, I think, or Michigan because I do not have it when I am in Chicago."

It turned out that she really couldn't see very well without glasses, so I took off mine and made her look through them. She put them on and walked around the observation platform for a while, looking out at the city. I followed her around, though I couldn't see much--just the blurred lights. After a while she gave me back the glasses. She said, "I like it better without the glass."

I put them on and looked around. It was just light enough to make out the shapes of buildings fairly clearly. Lighted windows showed



up as bright squares--I could even see inside some of the nearer buildings. The street lights were on and I could see cars and even people in the streets. I took off the glasses again and suddenly everything seemed softer, somehow, and more beautiful when you couldn't see it so clearly.

It did that night, anyway. With my glasses in my pocket it seemed as though we were alone up there, just the two of us. We stayed until closing time, leaning side by side on the parapet, looking out at the lights and talking. Finally we had to leave, so I put on my glasses and we went down.

I saw her off at the boat the next morning. And a few weeks later she sent me a wedding invitation--I wanted to go, but it was in Paris, so I just wrote her a letter of congratulations. I did get to Paris, once, several years later and with my wife. I looked up her street on the map, but didn't ever go there. We were just passing through in a hurry and didn't have enough time to see very much--we did spend a couple hours in the Louvre--but what can you see in a couple hours.



## SIDEREAL SLEIGHT OF HAND

Just as there's a certain time of year  
When the earth seems to reverse on its axis  
And rotates no longer from the spring,  
But in the direction of autumn,  
So there must be a particular stage  
When, for every mother's son,  
The whole universe does a flip  
And then whirls away in the opposite direction.  
One never quite catches the act,  
But later--and slowly--discovers the trick  
Already performed and the house lights turned up.

## EVEN BEFORE THE DRAGON WELL

## Part I: DAWN

The new men lurched as the landing barge ground onto the shore. It had transported them across several miles of tidal flat from a large troops ship to the landing place and now the helmsman held it there with his engines, its bow a few yards up on the mud and gravel bank. The bow ramp swung down and one by one the men carried their bags on to the land. Their breath made white puffs in the air. It was early, and the water and the land were still misty, so that neither the ship nor much of the terrain was visible. The mist was cold and smelled of muck and dead fish. As soon as all the men had disembarked, the ramp closed and the barge backed off from the shore. It swung around and quickly disappeared into the mist and the sound of its engines became indistinct and finally faded out altogether.

## 1

"Perdue, this is Sergeant Prior. He's in charge of communications. Sergeant, will you find him a bunk and show him around?"

"Yes, sir."

"Thank you, sir."

They both saluted and went outside. The sergeant waited while the private got his duffle bag up on his shoulder and then started

toward a group of drab green Quonset huts which were huddled nearby. He stopped at the door of one of the huts and held it open while Perdue carried his bag inside. There was a row of bunks along each side of the building where the roof curved down to the floor and at the far end there was another door. In a cleared space at the middle of the hut an Oriental woman in a long dress was ironing clothes. When Perdue saw the woman he stopped and stared, but Sergeant Prior gave no indication that he had even noticed her. Instead, he pointed to a bunk with a rolled-up mattress at one end.

"You can call this home for the duration. Leave that bag here and we'll go get some chow. I'll show you around this afternoon and you can draw bedding and your field equipment." Perdue glanced at the woman again as they went outside, but Prior did not mention her and neither did he.

The mess hall was made of the same green corrugated metal as the other buildings, but was larger and had a flat roof. Perdue followed the sergeant inside and through the serving line. They were served by women, not soldiers, and Perdue was so busy gawking that he hardly seemed to notice that the food was served on plates instead of the usual compartmented trays. Sergeant Prior's only comment was, "We get pretty good chow, considering."

Perdue trailed after him to a table in one corner of the dining room and was about to set his tray down when Prior said, "Sorry, this section is for sergeants." He nodded toward the main part of the room. "You'll have to sit over there."

Perdue wandered among the crowded tables until he finally located an empty place near the middle of the room. The three men who were already sitting at the table stopped talking when he approached and watched him put down his tray and seat himself.

One of them, a corporal, said, "Are you a new man or a visitor?"

"Well, I'm assigned here."

"What's your MOS?"

"Radio repairman."

The corporal made an impatient chirping sound with his lips.

"Yeah? Fresh out of school, huh?"

The man sitting opposite the corporal smiled at Perdue and said, "Hey, you're just the man we've been looking for." He held out his hand. "I work in the radio shop. Ray Canard."

They shook hands across the table. At the same time, the corporal picked up a milk carton and, discovering that it was empty, held it high in the air and began to shout.

"Hey! Mary! Idiwa!"

A young woman with a tray full of dirty dishes balanced on one hand came to the table. She was very slight and had a red bow tied in her black hair.

"Hey, Mary," the corporal said. "You my numbah one girl-san, right?" She laughed, took the empty carton in her free hand, and turned toward the kitchen. But before she could move away from the table the corporal jabbed his thumb in her rear. She yelped and in one reflex motion whirled around and dumped the tray onto his head.

Before the last dishes reached the floor everyone in the mess hall had turned to watch. Mary stood in the center of the room with her feet apart, not in a crouch but leaning slightly forward from the hips. The color had gone from her face.

"Sheepsikiyaa! You no touchi me!"

After a moment she threw down the empty milk carton and walked rapidly to the kitchen.

"You god damned gook! You bitch! Fuck you!"

The corporal sat without moving for an instant, then stood up abruptly. He took two short steps toward the kitchen, stared fiercely around the room, and then turned back to the table. He kicked at the crockery scattered on the floor around his chair and then grabbed some paper napkins from a holder on the table and tried to cleanse himself. Finally he flung the napkins to the floor and, bumping into several tables on the way, left the mess hall. The room was silent until some moments after he had gone.

"Amen," said Canard. "Shot down in the line of duty."

The third man, another corporal, glared at him. "She shouldn't've done that, the little bitch. Come on, let's get out of here."

"I'm not quite finished yet. You go ahead, why don't you."

After the second corporal had gone, Perdue said, "What's going to happen to that girl?"

"Well, I don't think she'll lose her job or anything--after all, it was self-defense. But those guys are gate guards, so they'll probably give her a hard time when she goes home tonight."

"How come there are so many civilians around here? There's even one in my barracks."

"Why not? We can pay them and they need the money. For a few bucks a month I don't have to pull KP and I get my clothes washed and my boots shined."

"It doesn't seem like the army at all."

Canard laughed. "It is, though. You still have to stand guard and a lot of other shit."

He wiped his mouth with his napkin and stood up. "Well, I have to get back to work. Can you find your way around all right?"

"Sergeant Prior's been taking care of me."

"Yeah? Well, see you later, huh?"

## 2

"You can see pretty well from here," said Sergeant Prior.

The horizon in all directions was generated by a ring of low mountains, their slopes bare and stony. The sky was overcast, though the day was bright enough, and the higher peaks were hidden in clouds. Within the ring of mountains the land lay fairly flat, like the bottom of a broad, shallow bowl. A narrow paved road emerged from the mountains on the side nearest the sea, crossed the floor of the valley, and disappeared among the mountains again on the opposite side. In the middle of the valley lay a small airfield, its one runway perpendicular to the road. Several dirty green hangars and workshops occupied one of the angles formed by the road and the runway; the company area, where



the two men stood, was on the other side of the runway. Across the road there was a small village of interlocking mud-and-wattle houses with thatched roofs, and on a rise behind the village there was another military building. Beyond that, and encircling the village and the airfield, a network of narrow dikes divided dry paddy fields.

"It sure looks bare," Perdue said. "I can't see a single tree."

"The farmers use them for firewood. Next summer you'll see them up in the hills collecting every little seedling. There's plenty of trees around Seoul, though."

"Where's that?"

"That way, past the hills. The road goes there." Then he pointed in the direction of the other military compound. "The PX is over there, on the other side of the village."

"Why's it so far away?"

"I don't know," said Prior. "It's not so bad, though, once you get used to it. You probably won't go very often, anyway." When Perdue looked at him curiously, he shrugged and said, "You're not the type." Then he started walking again toward the airstrip.

After lunch, they had gone to supply and Perdue had been issued his bedding and field equipment, which they had left piled on Perdue's bunk. At one point, he had asked, "Don't I get a rifle?" The sergeant's response was a snort. "To fix radios with? Come on, let's get going."

When they reached the runway, Sergeant Prior stopped again and peered into the sky in both directions.



"You have to be sure there's no plane landing before you go across. Sometimes you can't hear them when they swoop down, so you have to look pretty carefully."

They crossed the runway and circled around a number of small airplanes, their wings tied to stakes in the ground. Once past the tethered craft, the sergeant led Perdue to a small corrugated metal hut, set slightly apart from the main hangars and close against the barbed wire fence that encircled the compound. Beyond the fence lay the empty, terraced paddy fields. Prior opened the door and they went inside.

The building had no windows. Hanging lamps with conical shades glared down on long workbenches that extended the length of the room on either side, leaving the ceiling and the floor at the center in shadow. In the light under several of the lamps lay electronic equipment, covers removed or swung back to expose the wiring and major components. One of these gave off the thousand cycle howl of a signal generator. Various pieces of test equipment, with white dials and red pilot lights, were arranged on shelves above the workbenches. The atmosphere in the room bore the sweetly acrid pungance of burning flux and resistors.

Specialist Canard, whom Perdue had met in the mess hall, was leaning over the howling radio, his fingers buried within its wiring. After a moment he looked up.

"Oh, hi. I was beginning to wonder if Prior had lost you, or something."

The sergeant started. "Do you guys know each other?"

Canard looked solemn. "We radio repairmen always know each other. It's like a secret society--you're born into it." Then he grinned.

"Actually, we had lunch together."

"--You were with Pinker?"

"Yep."

"You sure do keep strange company."

"He's not so bad. He means well."

The sergeant grunted. He turned to look at Perdue and then said to Canard, "Well, here he is. He's all yours now."

Perdue said, "Thanks for getting me fixed up."

"Yeah, well, take it easy. I'll see you later." He turned away and went out.

Canard stood up and made a sweeping gesture around the room.

"Well," he said, "this is it. Ever work on aircraft radios before?"

"Not really. Just a little in radio school."

"Well, there's not much to them. Everybody around here's snowed, though--we're the only guys here who know anything about electronics. To them it's all like magic, so they don't mess with us much."

Perdue looked surprised. "I never thought of that. I guess it does seem sort of mysterious from the outside. How about Sergeant Prior, though? Doesn't he know anything about radios?"

"Prior? Hell, no. He's just a soldier. They put him in charge of commo, but he doesn't know the first thing about it. He's a 'leader of men.'"

Canard picked up a microphone from one of the workbenches.

"Well, let's get started," he said. "You might as well learn how to

call the tower, first thing. You have to call them to check out every set you fix. Besides, it keeps them awake."

When he pressed the talk switch, a quick burst of greenish light appeared on the face of an oscilloscope across the room.

"Ah alpha two six tower, this is radio repair, how do you read, over?" Thin lines of green light danced wildly on the screen in rhythm with his voice and again when the tower responded.

"Ah roger radio repair, this is alpha two six, read you loud and clear, how me, over?"

"Ah read you loud and clear, two six, could you give me a short count please, over?"

"Ah roger radio repair, short count follows, one two three four five five four three two one, how do you read, over?"

"Ah thank you two six, read you loud and clear, radio repair out."

Then Canard held the microphone out to Perdue. "Okay? Want to try it?"

"How come you have the scope hooked up to the radio?"

Canard chuckled. "It doesn't mean anything at all, but it sure does mystify people. There was a general in here one time on an inspection tour--he was just leaving when some plane called the tower and the scope lit up. I told him we were monitoring the quality of the control tower transmissions and he thought it was really great. He stood there for ten minutes, just staring at the scope, waiting for somebody to transmit something." He thrust the microphone at Perdue again. "Here. Give it a whirl." When Perdue hesitated, Canard said, "You'll have to

do it sooner or later. Might as well get it over with. Just ask them how they read you."

Perdue took the microphone and pressed the button.

"Uh. Alpha two six tower, this is radio repair. Uh, how do you read. Over."

There was a brief pause and then, "Ah roger radio repair, read you loud and clear, how me, over?"

"Ah, this is radio repair, uh, read you loud and clear. Thank you. Uh, out."

"Ah roger radio repair, and welcome to the land of the morning calm, alpha two six out."

Canard laughed. Perdue turned to him and said, "What's that mean?"

"He could tell by the way you talk that you just got here."

"Yeah--but what's the land of the morning calm?"

"That's what the Chinese used to call this country. It's as good a name as any, I guess."

## 3

After dinner, Perdue made up his bed. When he had finished, he sat down on it and began to ready his field equipment, rolling the bed-roll to it. At first he was alone in the hut, but after a few minutes the other men who lived there began to come in from the mess hall. Most of them sat on their beds reading quietly, or lay back with their eyes closed. At one time or another each of them watched Perdue curiously

as he prepared his equipment, but no one spoke to him. He sat on the foot of his bunk, turned toward the arching side of the hut, so intent on what he was doing that he never noticed them watching him. While he was fastening his canteen to his cartridge belt, Ray Canard and the corporal who had insulted the waitress arrived. One of the men sat up and leered at the corporal.

"Hey, Pinker," he said. "You seen Mary lately?"

"Sheeit. That bitch. She gives me the ass!"

"She serve you dinner tonight?"

Another man said, "She sure did serve him this noon!"

Corporal Pinker snorted. "I'll serve her, if she don't watch out. Hell, I'll service her. I'll overfuckinhaul that bitch!"

The first man laughed. "Yeah? Who you going to get to help you?"

Pinker answered with a one finger salute and everyone laughed.

He looked brashly around the room until he noticed Perdue at work on his field equipment. "Hey, radio man," he said. "We ought to take you out and get you some poontang." The other men laughed again and Perdue looked, smiled vaguely, and then returned to his work.

Suddenly Pinker swung around. "Hey, what time is it? I got to get out and relieve Kerr at the gate so's I can shake down them waitresses when they go home."

The man who had spoken to him first said, "Better not shake down that Mary. She's liable to let you have it again."

"She best not, if she knows what's good for her," said Pinker. He grabbed his field jacket and hat and rushed out the door.

as he prepared his equipment, but no one spoke to him. He sat on the foot of his bunk, turned toward the arching side of the hut, so intent on what he was doing that he never noticed them watching him. While he was fastening his canteen to his cartridge belt, Ray Canard and the corporal who had insulted the waitress arrived. One of the men sat up and leered at the corporal.

"Hey, Pinker," he said. "You seen Mary lately?"

"Sheeit. That bitch. She gives me the ass!"

"She serve you dinner tonight?"

Another man said, "She sure did serve him this noon!"

Corporal Pinker snorted. "I'll serve her, if she don't watch out. Hell, I'll service her. I'll overfuckin'haul that bitch!"

The first man laughed. "Yeah? Who you going to get to help you?"

Pinker answered with a one finger salute and everyone laughed.

He looked brashly around the room until he noticed Perdue at work on his field equipment. "Hey, radio man," he said. "We ought to take you out and get you some poontang." The other men laughed again and Perdue looked, smiled vaguely, and then returned to his work.

Suddenly Pinker swung around. "Hey, what time is it? I got to get out and relieve Kerr at the gate so's I can shake down them waitresses when they go home."

The man who had spoken to him first said, "Better not shake down that Mary. She's liable to let you have it again."

"She best not, if she knows what's good for her," said Pinker. He grabbed his field jacket and hat and rushed out the door.



After he had gone, Canard stood up and said, "Say, I'm thirsty. Is the club open yet?"

Someone else said, "Yeah, good idea." He jerked his head in Perdue's direction and made a sly face at Canard. "Let's all go over to the club and have a drink." Almost in unison the other men got up from their bunks and began putting on their jackets and hats.

As they started to leave Canard said, "Hey, Perdue, you coming?"

"Thanks, but I've got to take care of this stuff."

"Hell, leave it. The houseboy'll do it in the morning."

"Well, I thought I should do it myself."

Canard stood in the doorway. "Aaah, that's basic training stuff. You've got to get over all that nonsense they tell you in basic--all that gung-ho shit. They try to make you into some kind of damn machine." He held the door open. "You're never going to use that junk anyway. Come on."

Perdue shrugged and got up. He followed Canard outside and across the cleared ground from which he and Sergeant Prior had looked at the valley that afternoon. The club was directly across the field from their hut, next to the main gate. Inside, it was completely dark, except for a small lamp behind the bar and a candle stuck in a bottle on each table. Canard spotted the others sitting around one of the tables, their faces barely visible in the faint candlelight. He led Perdue to them and they sat down.

"What are we drinking?" he said. When everyone suggested something different, he held up his hands to restrain them.



"Wait a minute," he said. "This is an important occasion. We need something really special. How about green dragons?" There was enthusiastic assent, so Canard raised his arm to summon a waiter.

"Waiter, bring us each a green dragon." Then he turned to Perdue. "Have you ever had a green dragon?"

"No, I've never even heard of them."

"It's no wonder--this is the only place you can get them."

One of the other men leaned forward into the light and said, "We invented them."

Canard said, "That's right. We decided that this company needed a special drink for ceremonial occasions, so we got the bartender to whip up something with an Oriental flavor and a Western punch."

Perdue said, "What's in them?"

Canard looked all around as though he were a conspirator and then leaned close to Perdue and arched his eyebrows. "It's a secret formula. Nobody knows except us." He peered at the other men sitting at the table. "What do you think--should we tell him?"

They nodded solemnly. The man sitting on the other side of Perdue said, "He looks trustworthy. Tell him."

"All right. But you've got to swear never even to mention the name of the drink outside this company--on pain of death."

Perdue grinned. "Okay," he said. "I promise."

The first man said, "I don't think he's serious. Maybe we shouldn't tell him after all."

"I promise, I promise."

Canard studied him gravely. "Well, all right. It's one shot of creme de menthe and two of 150-proof rum, with a pinch of ginger and a teaspoon of lemon juice."

At that point the waiter arrived with the drinks. When they were distributed, Canard rose and stood behind Perdue. "Gentlemen, I wish to introduce to you the newest member of our company, a radioman extraordinary and lately arrived from the land of the big PX." He placed his hand on Perdue's shoulder. "Gentlemen, I give you Private First Class Perdue. State your given name, Private Perdue."

"Roy."

"Roy, on behalf of the men assembled here and the whole mother fucking company, I welcome you to Frozen Chosen, the Last Place on Earth."

He raised his glass and was about to drink, but suddenly said, "No. Wait. Watch this." He sat down again and held the glass up to the candle, tilting it until the green liquid met the flame. With a soft plopping sound, the alcohol vapor ignited and flickered there in the glass, pale blue above the green drink. Canard lifted the glass of burning spirits aloft and held it there for a moment. Then he lowered it to his lips and blew into it. The blue flame went out and at that instant he tipped back the glass and emptied it into his mouth. Tears came to his eyes and he coughed several times. When he was able to breathe again he wheezed triumphantly at Perdue. "There! That's a green dragon!"

Perdue and the other men knocked back their own drinks and there was a great chorus of coughs and gasps. They all laughed and wheezed and pounded their chests.

Canard said to Perdue, "Well, how do you like it?"

Perdue shook his head to one side and wiped his eyes. "Man. That's really something, all right."

The waiter appeared with a second round of drinks, which they approached somewhat more cautiously than the first. Just then, a band at the far end of the room started playing dance music so loud that the men had to shout at each other.

"That goddamn band," the man beside Perdue said. "Those sons of bitches ought to be locked up or something. They can't play worth a shit."

Canard said, "Their trouble is, they're Orientals trying to play Western Music, so it always sounds like an imitation."

"Sounds like shit to me."

Perdue swung around to look at the band. Several couples had begun to dance in an open space near the bandstand and when noticed them he stared for a moment and then turned to Canard. "Hey. Where--how did those girls get in here?"

"Those aren't girls," said Canard. "They are ladies of the night. Here by special invitation only. Each one of them has been escorted by some GI." He raised his glass in a toast to the dancers and everyone laughed.

The man sitting across from Perdue said, "Hey, what about that goddamn Pinker--old Mary sure let him have it, didn't she?"

There was another round of laughter.

"Boy, I'd sure like to get in her pants."

"Yeah, me too. She's got a nice little ass."

"Yeah, but she don't go down for nobody."

A third round of drinks appeared on the table.

"Shit. These fuckin' broads're all the same. They even look the same. They all got the same flat face and the same black hair and the same slanty eyes."

"Yeah--put an American flag over their face and fuck'em for Old Glory!"

Laughter. Somebody knocks over a drink.

Another round comes. Perdue picks up his glass and holds it to one eye, looking at the image of the candle flame in the green liquid. Then he closes his eyes and kills the drink in one gulp.

He stared at the table. His glass was full again. He picked it up and took a sip. Then he stood up, standing very straight.

"I am going to step outside for a moment."

He held himself tall and did not bump into any tables, but no one watched him anyway.

Outside, the air was cool and the night very dark. Across the drill field there was a light over the door of his hut. He turned toward the light and launched himself into the darkened field. He still carried his glass in one hand, and he sipped from it occasionally as he walked. But although he kept pointed toward the light, he listed slightly to one side, and so his actual course took him laterally

across the field to its edge. There he straightened up, but overcorrected and heeled over to the other side. Eventually, after crossing the field several times, he reached the door of the hut. He went inside, found his bunk and fell on it. The glass, which was empty by then, he still held in his hand.

## 4

"Ray, how do I get to the PX? I need some soap and toothpaste."

Canard grinned at him. "I'd get some aspirin, if I were you. You sure looked awful this morning."

"Very funny. How do I get there?"

"Sure you feel up to it?" Canard chuckled and then added, "It's quite a walk." Perdue sighed impatiently, so Canard said, "Okay. You go to the right on the hard top until you get to the village. There's a little dirt road that goes off to your left--it's the main street of the village. The PX is at the end of it. You can't miss it."

"Thanks. Anything I can bring you?"

"No, but you'd better hustle, if you're going. It's almost dark."

Perdue walked across the drill field and past the club to the gate. As he was about to pass through, Corporal Pinker came out of a little guard shack and hailed him.

"Hey, radio man. Let me see your rubbers."

"What?"

"You got to have some rubbers on you every time you go out of the compound. It's a regulation."

"But I'm going to the PX."

"I don't care. I can't let you out without any." He reached into his pocket and brought out a small cardboard box. "Here, take some of mine. You can pay me back later."

Perdue hesitated and Pinker said, "You a cherry-boy? I thought so. That won't last long around here." He laughed loudly. Then he took Perdue's hand and pressed the box into it.

"Here, put 'em in your pocket," he said more softly. "And take it easy, huh." Then he turned and went back inside the guard shack.

The instant Perdue stepped on to the road a pack of small boys surrounded him, tugging at his trousers and leaping up to grab at his jacket and all the while screaming shrilly and unintelligibly. "Hey shine GI hey shine GI hey shine GI." At first he tried to push past them, but they only screamed the louder and continued pulling at his clothing. Finally he flung out both arms and yelled at them to stop. The shrill shouts subsided, but the boys stood crowded around him so that he could not move away.

"What do you want?"

The largest of the boys knelt down and spit on Perdue's boot. Then, before Perdue could move, he began to daub shoe polish on the boot with his fingers. Perdue waited, rigid, while the boy rubbed at the polish with a length of nylon stocking and then repeated the procedure with the other boot. The entire process took less than a minute. Then the boy stood up and held out his hand.

"Feetee cent."



Perdue shrugged, reached into his pocket, and handed him the money. But as soon as he turned and started to go the boys began their screaming again. He struggled through them, knocking away their clutching hands, and doggedly marched down the road. The boys followed him for some distance, then returned to their station near the gate.

Through a culvert under the paved road a thin stream of greenish water flowed. It emerged some distance inside the fence of the airfield, where it emptied into a drainage ditch beside the runway. A large wooden sign fastened to the fence above the culvert bore the legend ANYONE ON OR NEAR THIS FENCE WILL BE SHOT. The culvert marked the junction of the hard top road and the dirt main street of the village. The little stream, which was partly run-off from the village well and partly kitchen sewage, meandered the length of the dirt street.

Perdue stepped down off the pavement and started walking up through the village. On each side of the street there were about a dozen open-fronted shops, most of which appeared deserted. He paused briefly in front of one which displayed large photographs of radios, but the inscriptions on the pictures were not in English and no actual radios were visible. In another shop a cuttlefish hung by one tentacle from a hook in the ceiling, and a couple long black eels lay full length on a piece of brown paper on the counter.

As Perdue started up a rise leading from the village to the PX, an old woman stepped out of a shop and hurried after him. "Hey GI," she said. He stopped and waited until she drew near. She held out some money to him.



"Hey GI, you buy cigaret?" He made no immediate response, so she thrust the money at him again.

"You go PX, you buy cigaret?"

"Thank you, but I don't smoke."

"Numbah one! You buy me two, tree cahton."

"For you? Oh, no, I'm sorry. I can't. There's a regulation against it."

She waved the money and grinned at him, displaying barren gums. "Yes, you buy."

"No, really, I can't. I'm sorry." He turned around and began to walk away. The old woman came after him, but she could not keep pace. She shook the money at him.

"You buy, you GI! Viceroy! Numbah one!"

Perdue did not look back until he had reached the PX. By that time the old woman had disappeared.

The PX building was a king size Quonset hut. Inside, it was a large room with a high vaulted ceiling and rows of showcases extending from side to side, with only a narrow aisle down the middle. The showcases all were filled with radios, television sets, record players, tape recorders, cameras, movie projectors, slide projectors, binoculars, telescopes, typewriters, reading lamps, flashlights. A man wearing a white smock came out of a door marked OFFICE and approached Perdue.

"May I help you?" he said. He clasped his hands together as though he were praying.

"Yes, thank you. I'd like some toothpaste and some soap, please."

"Toothpaste we've got, but soap we don't. We've been out of it for some time now. Sorry."

The man led the way to a counter containing toiletries and stood by with hands still clasped while Perdue picked out a tube of toothpaste.

"Could I interest you in some deodorant? We've got sprays, roll-ons, and sticks."

"No, thanks."

"No? Well, Can I do anything else for you? A radio? Or a camera?"

"No, I don't think so, thank you."

On his way out, Perdue noticed a rack of paperback books and stopped to look. Several were by Mickey Spillane, and almost all of them had pictures of semi-clad girls on their covers. On the other side of the rack were some hot rod magazines and a few books by Norman Vincent Peale and Dale Carnegie.

Perdue stuck the toothpaste in a trouser pocket and went outside. The sun had set and the twilight smoothed all the rough edges of the village, mellowing the dirty yellow buildings and the muddy road to golden and bronze. The air was full of the sharp, sweet scent of charcoal cooking fires. From the slight elevation upon which the PX stood it was possible to see a few soft lights among the houses which lay off the road, sheltered from it by the shops.

Perdue paused and looked down into the village. As he stood there, three slender girls came from between some houses off to one

side and started up a path leading toward the PX. In the dusk the jet of their hair was softened and their faces glowed creamy and rose.

They mounted the hill single file, approaching Perdue, who stood and watched. They were smiling, and they came right to where he was standing, and when they reached him the first girl held out her hand and touched his sleeve.

"Hey GI, you come my house."

"No," said the second girl in the flat, harsh voice of the country. "You come my house. Numbah one house."

The first girl pushed at the second. "You havu numbah ten house." She yanked Perdue by the arm. "You come, GI."

The third girl elbowed herself between the other two until she was standing right up against Perdue. She wrapped one arm around his waist and pressed her chest against his side and arm.

"GI," she said softly, "you come my house. I havu bed. Numbah one stateside bed." Then she placed her free hand on Perdue's genitals and began to massage them. Her breath smelled of dead fish. He struck at her hand, causing her to lose hold of his groin and knocking her off balance. She grabbed at him again, but grasped only the toothpaste tube in his pocket.

Perdue wrenched himself free from her, his eyes wide open, and ran down the hill, through the village and onto the paved road. The girls' hoarse laughter **reverberated** among the empty shops behind him.

When he came near the gate of the airfield he began to walk, but he was still breathing heavily when he got there. Corporal Pinker saw him approaching and stepped out of the gate house.

"What's the hurry? The MP's after you?"

"No. I just felt like getting some exercise, so I jogged part way back."

"Yeah? Hmh. Hey, how'd you like the PX? Lotta good stuff there, huh."

"Yeah," said Perdue. He started past Pinker, then stopped abruptly. "Oh, your rubbers." He reached into his pocket and then blanched.

"Well," he said, "maybe I'll keep them for a while, if you don't mind. I might need them sometime."

"Well, look, I don't want to sound like an Indian giver, but I'm going off duty in a few minutes and it'd save me a trip to the orderly room. If you aren't going to use 'em right away."

Perdue sighed and withdrew the box. It was smeared with toothpaste.

"I guess you can still use them."

Pinker looked at the box, then at Perdue. Then he began to laugh. "You dumb fuck. You're not supposed to come on the outside of the box! Hey, what is this shit, anyway?"

"Toothpaste."

"Toothpaste!" He tilted his head to one side and looked suspiciously at Perdue. "Them fucking whoores been after you?" Perdue shrugged.

"You want to keep away from them scabby broads. Get you a steady jo-san. It's a hell of a lot cheaper by the month, and

cleaner, too. They get anything else from you? You got your money?"

He took Perdue's arm and turned him around. "Oh, shit. Look at your ass."

Perdue reached for his wallet, but his hip pocket was empty.

"Look at that," said Pinker. "They slit your pocket. They just caught your wallet when it fell out." He began walking in a circle around Perdue, shaking his head and laughing.

"Christ, did they take you. They really screwed you, didn't they. No shit."

Then he stopped in front of Perdue and looked at him. "Listen," he said. "Half of the goddamn gooks is whoores and the other half is slicky-boys. You can't trust 'em a fucking inch."

## PART II: DAY

The control tower operator blew a horn every afternoon at exactly five o'clock. It was a signal for the mechanics and technicians who worked on the airfield to knock off for the day and go back to the company area for dinner.

One day, just before the horn blew, a helicopter circled the airfield and came to rest on the runway, like a great dragonfly, near the gate leading to the company area. A man hopped out and dragged a large olive-brown bag to the ground. He waved to the pilot and the helicopter rose, hovered a moment, then darted away. He was still standing there by the gate when the first of the hungry men drew near.

The man with the bag was a sergeant. His fatigue trousers were damp and there was a dark stain down the front of his field jacket. One of the first men to reach the spot stopped and looked down at the bag.

"Hey, Sarge, what's in the bag?" Several other men stopped. The sergeant prodded the bag gently with his toe and then began to answer without looking up.

"You know that flight that went down in the river? We got most of them right away, but a few were carried off by the current. Some farmer found this one half way to the ocean."

"Yeah? Hey, let's see him."



"You don't want to see him."

"Sure," said someone else. "Why not?" The sergeant turned to him. By that time almost the entire company of men were there.

"He's been in the water three months."

The men were quiet. They shifted their weight from one foot to another, but they did not go away. The sergeant looked around over their heads.

"I wish that damn ambulance'd get here. It must be about chow time."

He shivered slightly, hunched his shoulders, and looked down at the bag again.

"They never did figure out what made it crash."

"He was sort of half afloat when we picked him up. You could see his back. I got into the water and reached under his arms to raise him up to the door of the chopper."

He held his hands palm up, level with his armpits.

"But he was pretty slippery. He just slid right out of my arms and down my chest."

He indicated the action with his hands. Then he looked up at the men.

"You still want to see him?"

No one answered. The sergeant bent down and unzipped the bag. The two lips of rubberized fabric spread open, exposing a swollen white belly, the skin almost transparent. A few hairs stood stiffly, as at attention, among a pattern of thin blue veins. A T-shirt was bunched up under the arms, forced there by the swollen abdomen. The face had

been wiped off, but incompletely, so that in places the skull showed through pulpy grey flesh.

## 5

"Mary," Canard said, "Our housegirl say she has too much work now for one girl. She say you want to changie jobs. You want to be housegirl? It's more money than waitress. We'll pay both of you the same."

"Ai," she said. "I want. But I no liku gatu guard." She glanced around the dining room. "Gatu GI numbah ten GI."

Canard smiled. "Pinker? Oh, he's not so bad. You just tell us if he gives you a hard time."

Mary hunched her thin shoulders and then let them down with a sigh. "Okay. I be housegirl. I start payday." She turned and walked away.

"Will she be any good as a housegirl?" said Perdue. "She's pretty small."

"Listen, don't underestimate her. She used to live in the North before the war. One day they shot her mother, father, and husband right in front of her, and she walked all the way down here carrying one kid and pregnant with another. She had the second one on the road. She's tough--all these people are."

"How come she doesn't get married again?"

"Well, I think she was for a while. When I first came here she used to live with the honey man, but I think she threw him out."

"The who?"

"The honey man. He collects the shit from latrines and sells it for fertilizer." He laughed. "Wait till summer. It doesn't stink much now, but when they spread it around the rice paddies it's pretty bad."

"What do they do with it in the winter?"

"Store it in big pits in the paddies. They mix it with water, stir it up, and let it ferment."

"Christ," Perdue said. "Some job. No wonder she kicked him out."

"Yeah. He's not a bad guy, though. I guess they just didn't get along. He didn't want to pay for the kids, or something."

Canard folded his paper napkin and laid it beside his tray. Then he leaned back in his chair and stretched. "Guess I'll go take a shower before the hot water's gone. I feel pretty grubby, anyway, after seeing that damn body."

"Yeah," Perdue said. "When he opened that bag--" He exhaled through his teeth and shook his head. Then he said, "That shower sounds like a good idea. It's always ice cold when I get there."

"Aha! That just goes to demonstrate the triumph of the scientific mind. Those mechanics all flock in there late at night to share the cold water. If they were smarter, they'd go earlier." He paused and then grinned at Perdue. "You know what they say--the early bird gets the warm!"

Perdue made a face. "For that, you can let me use your soap. The damn PX still doesn't have any."

The stove in the dressing room glowed cherry red around the top and the air was warm and moist. The two took off their clothes and hung them on thick wooden pegs which stuck out of the wall. Then they went into the shower room.

Canard turned on one of the middle showers and adjusted the water temperature. Perdue took the one next to him. Then Canard went along the row of showers, turning on all the hot water taps. The room filled with steam as the hot water splashed onto the wooden floor gratings.

Perdue said, "No wonder there's never any hot water later in the evening." He had to yell over the sound of the water.

Canard smiled at him. "You can turn them off if it bothers you. But I find it relaxing."

Perdue did not reply. Canard stepped out from under the water and began to soap himself. He lathered his hair first, then his arms, shoulders, and chest.

He passed the soap to Perdue and rinsed while Perdue soaped himself. Then he took the soap again and washed his feet, legs, and groin.

"The human body's pretty versatile," he said. "But there's one thing it's not very efficient at." He held out the soap to Perdue.

"Tell you what, Roy--if you wash my back, I'll do yours."

Perdue hesitated for a moment, looking at Canard through the steam. Then he took the soap and Canard turned around. Perdue rubbed suds on his neck and shoulders and Canard bent forward so that Perdue could wash his lower back. When it was done, Canard took the soap and washed Perdue. Then they both moved under the shower heads and the warm water poured over them, splashing from their shoulders, cascading down their bodies.

The two of them stayed there under the showers without speaking until the water began to run cold.

"Well, so much for the mechanics," said Perdue.

"Feel guilty about it?"

"Nope."

Although the hot water was spent, neither of the two made any move to leave. They danced in and out of the icy streams, their skin still warm and glowing. Canard filled his cupped hands with water and tossed it at Perdue. Perdue tried to dodge and yelled when the cold water hit him. He threw some water back at Canard and they traded splashes, laughing until they were covered with goosebumps. At last they turned off the showers and went into the dressing room, where they crowded around the stove, shivering, and dried themselves.

"What are you going to do tomorrow?" said Canard.

"I don't know. There isn't much to do around here on weekends, is there? I almost wish we had to work."

"Let's go on a picnic," said Canard. Perdue laughed. "No, I mean it. We can get the cooks to make us some sandwiches and we can get some beer at the club."

"Yeah, but where's there to go? It's all bare rice paddy out there."

"We could climb one of the mountains. Yeah, let's go climb a mountain. We can eat at the top. What do you say?"

"Well, okay. It beats just sitting around all day."

"Which one?" Canard said. "The tallest?"

"Might as well. But they all look about the same height. Maybe it doesn't make any difference."

"One of them's got to be the highest. What's the sense in climbing the second highest if you have the choice?" He looked around the ring of mountains surrounding the valley. "I wonder if we could see more clearly from the control tower?"

"Maybe so," Perdue said. "I've never been up there, anyway."

They crossed the runway and the tarmac with its tethered planes, and mounted a ladder to the observation room at the top of the tall tower. No one was in the tower, but the door was unlocked, so they went inside.

"Man, you really get a good view of the field from up here," said Perdue. "I wonder what it's like to sit up here all day looking down on everything."

"--telling everybody where to go."

"Yeah. It must be pretty lonely, though--it's so remote up here. You can't talk to anyone except by radio."

"Remote control, so to speak. But what the hell's the difference whether you're alone up here or down there? How many of those guys do you like well enough to want to be around all the time? You might just as well be up here. At least you can control things."

"I guess that's true," Perdue said. "But you have to go down sometime."



"The guy who's really smart probably stays up here all the time. Has his food sent up. And if he sees somebody he doesn't like, he sticks out his can and craps on him."

They both laughed. Then Canard said, "Well, this isn't getting us up any mountains. Which is the highest? Pick your peak."

"I think that one over there, in line with the main gate."

"Okay. It looks as though we can cut across those paddies right to the bottom of it."

When they had gone a short distance up the road, they jumped down to the level of the paddy field. It was about a mile to the base of the mountain, and the land between was broken by hundreds of small terraced paddies. Low, narrow earthen dikes wandered across the valley, dividing paddy from paddy, cutting the land into wildly irregular shapes. The mud of the paddy bottoms was dried and cracked in similar random patterns.

After they had walked single file along the top of a curving dike for several dozen yards, they turned onto an intersecting dike, following it to a third and then a fourth. Some of the paddy fields were higher than others, making it necessary for the men to climb up or down several feet at some intersections. When they happened to be walking on one of the lower dikes it was impossible to see over the higher ones, so that choosing the correct direction became largely a matter of guesswork. Because of the random way the dikes curved, as often as not they guessed wrong; even though they could always see the mountain, their actual progress toward it was slow.

"I'm beginning to feel as if we were doing one of those maze puzzles," said Perdue. "Can you go from START to FINISH by following an unbroken line."

"Yeah. Of course, we have the advantage of seeing the whole area from the tower. But I wonder how these gooks get around."

"They must just know which dikes go where. I don't suppose they get lost."

"Well, you can't really get lost here. You always know the general direction you want to go--in the daytime, at least."

They walked on for several minutes without talking. Presently the dike widened until it was several feet across. Canard stopped so abruptly that Perdue almost ran into him. At his feet was an oval depression in the ground, about the size of a bathtub, except that it was only a few inches deep. Its bottom was roughly flat and somewhat darker than the dirt of the path.

"Here's one of those honey holes, Canard said. "I almost didn't notice it." He touched the bottom surface of the depression with the toe of his boot. It yielded slightly and then cracked, and a thick, dark brown liquid oozed up through the fissure.

"Jesus, how deep is it?"

"I saw an empty one once that was about five or six feet."

They edged around the sides of the hole and continued on toward the mountain.

"It doesn't smell bad, though."

"Not now, it doesn't, but wait till summer. I don't know how those poor gooks can stand it. It's bad enough from inside the compound, but they have to wade around in it."

"You'd think they'd get the hell out of here if it smells so shitty. I sure wouldn't stay around very long."

"What choice do they have? We at least know enough to insulate ourselves from this sort of thing. But they're too damn dumb. They spend their whole lives right here and don't know there's anything else."

They continued on for a while and then Canard looked over his shoulder at Perdue. "If I lived here I'd make myself a map of the dikes and honey holes." Perdue did not reply; and soon they were at the base of the mountain, which rose up abruptly from the paddies.

Canard and Perdue started straight up the steep face of the mountain, but soon discovered that it was easier to angle across it. They climbed in this zig-zag fashion, breathless nevertheless, until they attained the summit. There they flopped to the ground and rested. After a time, Canard stood up and looked about him.

"Roy, look at this view! You can just about see the whole world from up here."

Perdue got up and the two of them walked about, surveying the land laid out before them. To one side the hill fell directly to the sea, and the coastline and tidal flats reached right and left to the horizon. In the other direction the valley lay locked in the clasp of the mountains, the village and airfield set in a mosaic of paddy-fields. From that altitude it was possible to see where the road escaped through passes at either side of the valley.

Canard pointed across the valley in the direction taken by the road. Through the narrow pass in the hills sunlight glinted and shimmered.

"See that light out there? That's the river. Seoul's on the other side of it."

"Have you ever been there?"

"Yes, once."

"What's it like?"

Canard shrugged. "Well, it's hard to describe. You really have to see it for yourself."

"Did you like it?"

Canard snorted. "Nope. It's all yours. Too many people to suit me. I'd much rather be up here where I can see what's going on and don't have to smell my neighbors."

He picked up a stone and threw it hard toward the valley. It flew in a long arc and struck far down the slope, bouncing and setting other small stones rolling. The flurry of stones bounded down the hill almost to the very bottom, leaving a long trail of brown dust.

"Hey, I'm getting hungry," said Perdue. "Let's break out the sandwiches."

He sat down on a flattened boulder and pulled some sandwiches and beer cans from his field jacket pockets. He spread out the lunch beside him on the rock and opened the two cans of beer. Canard came and sat down on the other end of the boulder. He picked up his beer and raised it to Perdue in a silent toast.

They ate slowly, without speaking, and then finished off the beer. Perdue leaned back on the rock with his hands under his neck and closed his eyes. Canard looked out over the valley.

"What are you going to do when you get out, Roy?"

"Oh--I don't know. I really haven't thought about it. What about you?"

"I'm going back to school. Why don't you study engineering? Electrical engineers are going to own the future."

"Yeah, maybe so. But I don't know if I want to spend the rest of my life behind a desk."

"There are other things a hell of a lot worse. At least you're pretty much your own boss and you make a good living. Money's about the only thing that gives you any choice at all in life. Without it, you're stuck with those clods down there in the company. Besides, everybody's in awe of engineers."

"Yeah, but there's got to be more to it than that. You can't just lock yourself away in an air conditioned office all your life."

"Hah! Maybe you'd rather wade around in a rice paddy all day, eating somebody else's shit. Those guys don't have any choice at all."

Perdue sat up on the boulder. "Aw, bullshit. They could get out if they really wanted to. They probably like it there."

Canard snapped at him. "What the hell do you know about them? You still can't even tell them apart!"

"That's not true," said Perdue, but without real conviction. In a moment he grinned and stood up. "Maybe we should be heading back. It's getting late."

"God damn stove."

In the center of the hut there was a large steel space heater, rectangular in shape and grey in color. It was made in several layers, or shells. The outside of it was a box of pressed steel sheeting, in which long slotted holes had been stamped. Within, as in a cage, there was another steel box, the fire box, which had no holes. A small pipe fed the fire box oil from the drum outside and a large pipe rose from the top to carry off the smoke.

Set in the side of the heater was a small steel door which had a mica observation window in it. Through this window it was possible to watch the fire within, in order to see whether the fire box needed cleaning or some other attention. When everything was well, the fire burned cleanly and heated the fire box, which in its turn radiated warmth throughout the entire hut. Sometimes, on particularly cold days or nights, the fire raged so hot that its roar made talking difficult in the hut. At such times the fire box itself became red hot and the grey paint of the outside shell rose in blisters.

The inevitable result was that a great jet of black carbon issued from the top of the hut, drifted over the company area, and fell like a blasted snow. Because it was so light and fine an ash, it went everywhere, seeping through window frames and door jambs, covering everything it chanced to fall upon with greasy black carbon. The stove-pipe was not sufficient to carry off all the carbon, so that more and more of it was deposited on the inside of the fire box. Eventually,



the deposits grew so heavy that the fire began to strangle itself, which caused it to throw off even more of the carbon. If someone did not tend to the fire when this happened, it gradually died by asphyxiation.

If the fire died during the day, it was not a matter of very great concern because someone would resuscitate it. But when it happened during the night the hut soon lost its heat; water froze in the wash basins and the sleeping men withdrew deep into their narrow sleeping bags. They lay still and silent during these nights, their snores deadened by the cold which bound them in their bags, as though reluctant to restore them to the day.

"Ai, chuketta!"

She went directly to the heater, knelt on the floor in front of it, and looked at the isinglass window. Then she opened the metal door and peered into the darkened fire box. She arose and went to a corner of the hut where there was an ironing board and some cleaning materials, drew a rag from a box, and knelt again before the cold stove. She thrust the rag through the door and presently withdrew it black with carbon. Then, with a wooden match which she brought from her jacket pocket, she lit a piece of paper and threw it into the fire box. When the fresh oil began to burn she closed the metal door and stood up.

By the time she had removed her jacket and had hung it near the ironing board, the fire was roaring and the fire box was beginning to glow. Although the air in the hut was still frigid, the radiated heat of the stove reached to each corner and the men began to raise themselves up in their beds.

"Thank you, Mary," said Canard.

"Yeah!" said Pinker. "Sheeit, I damn near froze to death last night. Wish they'd make those damn stoves so's they'd stay lit without somebody keeping after them all the time."

Perdue lay leaning back on his elbows, as Canard and Pinker and the others talked and started struggling out of their sleeping bags.

At the other end of the room, Mary was picking up the soiled clothes which the men had thrown on the floor the night before. The other house girl had not arrived yet, so Mary was gathering up laundry from all of the men, not just from the half she worked for. Perdue watched her as she worked her way around the room, bending over to pick up the clothes between each pair of bunks.

When she came to Perdue's bed she had both arms full and had had to bend down several times to retrieve fallen articles of clothing.

"Hey, you GI, why you no get upu? You be latu. No catchi breakufas'."

Perdue started when she spoke to him. She dropped the clothes on the foot of his bed and began to stuff two T-shirts with them. He sat up and watched her.

"How do you always know which clothes belong to which guy?" Mary looked at him, but did not appear to understand.

"I mean, how did you learn which laundry mark was whose? The numbers don't mean anything and you don't even know our names, do you?" She frowned for a moment, then smiled.

"Ah, whichi shirtu whichi GI." She held out a T-shirt and pointed to some thread stitched into the bottom hem.

"See. This radio shopu honcho."

"Ray? How can you tell?"

She showed him some socks, each of which had some stitches in the toe. "This gatu GI. This cooku. This gatu honcho," she said vehemently. She threw Pinker's sock on the bed, then picked it up and stuffed it into one of the shirts full of clothes. She pointed to the thread stitched into that shirt.

"This gatu honcho shirt," she said. Then, more quietly, "See? Thisu mean numbah ten. He numbah ten GI." Perdue chuckled.

"What's your mark for me?" Mary picked up a pair of shorts from the floor beside the bed and showed him the odd little stiches she had put in it.

"What's it mean?"

Mary's face, normally a pale golden color, became almost pink and she giggled. "Ai, no."

She started to turn away, but Perdue grabbed the shorts out of her hand.

"Wait a minute, now. They're my clothes. What's that mark mean?" Mary shook her head and, still laughing said, "No, no, no."

"Aw, come on. Now I'm really curious."

Mary giggled again and Pinker, who had been dressing beside his bunk at the far end of the hut, turned around and shouted.

"Hey, radio man, let's cut out that grab-assin'. You're not paying her enough for that."

Now Perdue's face turned red, but before he could reply, Pinker called out again.

"Mama-san, you better leave him alone so's he can get out of bed. I bet you embarrass him standing there. If he don't get his ass out of bed right now, he's gonna miss chow."

Mary looked at Perdue again and smiled. Then she leaned close to him and spoke softly.

"Mean 'Cherry-boy.'" She giggled and danced away from Perdue's corner. Hoisting up the two shirts full of dirty clothes, she ran out to the laundry shack.

After a moment, Perdue climbed out of his sleeping bag and got dressed. He ran to the mess hall and managed to get there barely in time to be served. He carried his tray to the table where Canard was sitting, sat down, and began to eat.

Canard finished his meal, wiped his mouth, folded his napkin. Then he leaned back in his chair and pulled a cigarette out of his shirt pocket and placed it between his lips. In one fluid motion, he drew a lighter from his trousers pocket, struck it, and lit his cigarette. Snapping shut the lid, he returned the lighter to his pocket, the entire operation lasting no more than two or three seconds.

"You get better at that everyday."

"Thanks. I started out to shoot down Pinker for bragging that he was the fastest lighter in the Far East, but now I just seem to do it naturally."

"Well, it sure is impressive. Did you beat him?"

Canard smiled. "Yeah. He'd been doing a lot of talking about how he'd escaped from the MP's by burning down a house. He claimed that one night an MP spotted him ducking into some whore's hooch. He hadn't even gotten his pants off when this guy starts beating on the door, yelling for him to come out. He knew he'd catch hell for being inside a house, but there was only one door and the MP was right in front of it. Then, he said, he had an inspiration. He whipped out his lighter and set fire to the thatched roof. When the MP saw the flames coming out of the roof he stopped pounding on the door and started to yell, 'Fire!' So then Pinker kicked out a window at the back of the house and beat it. Bragged about it for weeks. The MP knew he'd broken out, but he couldn't see him in the dark because of looking at the fire."

"Hey, that's pretty clever. I didn't think Pinker was that smart."

Canard looked at him coldly. "I'm not sure smart's the right word for it."

"Well, I guess not. You know what I mean."

"Yeah. Say, that reminds me, though. If I were you, I'd stay away from Mary."

Perdue looked surprised and Canard said, "She has enough to do just washing clothes." He stood up and smiled at him. "Ready to go to work?"

Perdue got up and they left the mess hall. Neither of them spoke as they walked among the huts and across the drill field. When they had crossed the runway Perdue broke the silence.

"I've been thinking about what you said about Mary. It really surprised me because I guess she was just another gook to me until this morning. I was watching her when she was picking up the laundry--I mean I really looked at her for the first time. Y'know--as Pinker says, she has a nice ass." When Canard did not respond, he said, "Well, for a gook."

Canard stopped walking entirely and turned to face him. "Remember when we climbed the mountain? You were the big expert on these people, telling me all about how they ought to leap out of the rice paddies and do what they really want to do in life. Big deal. And now you tell me how you've finally gotten so you can tell them apart--by their asses."

He started walking again and then turned around and laughed. "I'm sorry, Roy. But sometimes you talk as though you don't know your ass from a hole in the ground." He smiled and took a step toward Perdue. "Come on. Let's get to work, huh?"

Perdue gave him an embarrassed grin and they continued walking toward the radio shop, moving among the parked aircraft and past the control tower and the hangars. Several mechanics had one of the smaller airplanes by the tail and were dragging it through the huge open doorway of a hangar. Someone had removed its propeller and its door flapped listlessly open and shut as the mechanics heaved it over the threshold of the hangar.

"Ray," Perdue said. "Have you noticed that the housegirls treat us differently from the other guys?"



"Sure. We are different, don't you think?"

"I don't know--I think--"

"In the first place, we're different almost by definition because our training's in electronics, which nobody else here knows anything about. And then too, guys in the radio shop have always had the reputation of being nicer to work for. We don't give them a hard time, the way most of the other guys do. Why we don't, I don't know. I guess we're just naturally more considerate, or something."

"That sounds pretty egotistical, doesn't it?"

"Oh, yeah. I wouldn't talk this way in front of anyone else."

He looked at Perdue. "But I'm sure it's true. Aren't you?"

When they reached the radio shop, Canard started to work the combination padlock on the door, but the lock suddenly fell open in his hand, the hasp hanging in two pieces. He glanced at Perdue for an instant, then opened the door and stepped inside.

The radio shop was empty. The benches and the high stools were there, but there was nothing else. All the signal generators and meters and oscilloscopes and tools and tubes--everything was gone.

Canard stood just inside the door, turning from one side to the other, while Perdue peered over his shoulder. Finally, he moved from the doorway and Perdue went in and turned on the lights. Canard was walking around the room, touching the places where the various pieces of equipment had been.

"God damn them," he said. "God damn them." He turned toward Perdue. "They took every god damned thing, Roy."

He went to the door and stepped out into the daylight. Abruptly, he dashed around the corner of the building toward the barbed-wire fence which separated the airfield from the paddyfield. In a moment he came running back.

"Guard! Guard!" He ran in the direction of the control tower. When he reached the tower he shouted again for the guard and then began to climb the long ladder to the top.

## 8

"Where is that old bitch? I thought sure as hell I'd get her right off. Well, sooner or later some old boy's going to lay her right down on the table and I'll take her if I can. Shoot for the moon, I always say."

"Come on, Pinker, shut up and play. It's your lead."

"Now don't push me, Kerr. I'm just trying to decide what card to lead off with." He rearranged some of the cards in his hand and then looked around at the other men.

"Now, I know one of you's got her, but I don't know who. So, when in doubt--" He selected a card and slapped it down on the table. "--lead spades." The other men followed with low spades, which Pinker immediately raked in.

"So, you guys are playing it safe, huh? Well, I'm gonna see if I can't force her out." He threw down another spade and this time reaped a heart.

"Oh, oh. Canard's out of spades already. Now the fun starts."

Kerr chuckled, "That's not the only thing Canard's out of. Looks to me like he's out of business for a while."

Canard closed up his hand of cards and glared at Kerr. "That's not terribly funny," he said. "Who was supposed to be on guard last night, anyway?"

"Not me. I don't have nothing to do with what goes on down on that field. I just guard the gate, that's all."

Pinker lead another card. "Now who's talking? Hey, did they get that fence fixed yet? Ain't no use us watching the goddamn gate if there's holes in the fucking fence. Them god damn slicky-boys'll steal us blind if we ain't careful."

He took another trick and led again.

"Kerr," he said, "were you here when they broke in over at the Quartermaster compound?" He sat back in his chair and laid his cards on the table. "They took everything they could get through the fence. They cut a big goddamn hole with bolt cutters and took out everything they could carry. Only thing was, they'd got into the graves registration building by mistake. What they got was mostly them big coffin containers. It was right after that plane crashed in the river and the place was full of dead bodies, all sealed up in them boxes. Shit, I bet they was surprised when they finally got them fuckers open."

Kerr tilted back in his chair and laughed. "Sheeit," he said finally, slapping his thigh. Perdue looked at Conard, who stared without smiling at the cards in his hand, and then back at Pinker again.

"You mean they stole the bodies? What happened to them?"

"How should I know? Probably sold them or something. You can sell anything here. That's what's happened to all your radio shit. If you want it back, go in to the village and buy it." He picked up his cards and drew in the trick from the center of the table.

Perdue shook his head. "But what could anyone do with dead bodies?"

"Don't worry about it. They sure as hell don't. Your old buddy Canard here ain't worried. He knows what in hell's what. Shit, there's some things you just can't do anything about, so you don't waste your time worrying about them."

Canard looked up from his cards. "You'd better start worrying about how to stop other slicky-boys from breaking in, now that somebody's set a precedent."

"They won't try it again right away. They'll figure we'll be laying for them, so they'll wait till they think the heat's off." He grinned at Canard. "Probably just about the time your new radio stuff comes in."

Canard glared at him for a moment and then said, "It's your lead." Pinker looked down at his handful of cards and frowned. After a moment he drew out the ace of spades and laid it on the table.

"Okay, you sons of bitches, let's see if anybody's going to play hero and eat that old girl."

The queen of spades did not appear, but Kerr threw out the king. "Kerr's playing it safe," said Pinker. "What about you, radio man? You going to be a hero tonight?"

Perdue hesitated a moment before replying. "How come you always try to run them?"

"That's obvious," said Canard. It's typical of the way he lives. He's reckless because he never looks far enough ahead."

"If that's so, how's come I win so often? Huh?"

"You don't win all that often. And when you do win, it's usually just a hand, not the whole game. You lose big as often as you win big. You're a tactician, but not a strategist."

Pinker shrugged. "Maybe so, but I can't see any sense in being cautious all the time. It's no goddamn fun if you don't take a few chances now and then."

"Even if they don't pay off?" Perdue said.

"Shit, I don't play to not lose, I play to win. I'd a damn sight rather get twenty five against me, trying to get twenty six against you fuckers, than I would to try not to ever take a heart at all."

"But what if you get dealt a lousy hand? Then what do you do?"

"When I draw a shitty hand, I always figure somebody else has a good one and I try to stop him from running them. I always try to keep a high heart or the queen of spades back, just in case somebody else starts a run. Then, at the last minute, just when he thinks it'll go, I shoot him down."

"But in the long run," Canard said, "you'll lose the game on points, even though you might win a few hands."

"Aw, fuck. It's just a goddamn game, just like the army and everything else. If you take it serious, you don't enjoy it. Shit, there's guys that spend their whole lives trying to beat the goddamn army and the most they ever get out of it's maybe a stripe or a soft job once in a while. But they're so worried all the time, they don't have no fucking fun." He grinned at Canard. "You ought to know by now, sometimes being careful doesn't do no good. You end up with nothing, anyhow."

"Now watch this and you'll see what I mean." He selected a card and flourished it high above the table, then slapped it down. "Here she is, the old bitch herself!"

Kerr stared at the card. "Hey, I thought you said somebody else had it."

"Now you know," said Canard. "You can't believe a word he says." Playing ahead of his turn, he threw a high heart on top of the queen.

"I told you I always keep that bitch. I never give her away. Come on, now, let's see them hearts. Come on, Kerr, it's your play."

Kerr played a diamond; Perdue, a low spade. Pinker leaned forward and swept in the cards and then led another spade. This time, his was the only spade and he collected more hearts.

Kerr began to frown. "He's going to do it. He's going to run the whole goddamn deck. Somebody better stop him. I can't stop him."

Pinker gave a slight smile and slid the king of diamonds to the middle of the table. He watched closely as the others played their



cards, all of which were diamonds. No one spoke. Pinker plucked another card from his hand and threw it on the table.

Kerr looked around at Perdue and Canard. "Ten of diamonds. Jesus Christ, he's probably loaded with diamonds." He played a four. Perdue tossed out the jack of diamonds. Canard, his eyes turned down at the table, laid the queen of hearts beside Perdue's jack.

Immediately, Pinker swept in the cards and, before anyone could say anything, he led another diamond.

"Hey, what the hell you doing?" said Kerr. You lost that trick. Roy put down a jack on top of your ten and Canard put down the heart. You lost. It's Roy's lead, not yours."

Pinker looked for a moment at the cards he had taken and then stared at Perdue. "Son of a bitch. I thought that jack had already gone. I was sure it'd gone." He glanced at the remaining cards in his hand and then looked at Kerr.

"Whose heart is that? Yours?"

"Nope. Canard's."

"Shit, you might know it." He turned on Canard. "Holding them god damn hearts back until you can slough 'em off on somebody else. What a chicken shit way to play." Canard made no response, other than to return Pinker's stare. After a time, Pinker swung around toward Perdue.

"Well, radio man, what're you gonna lead?" When Perdue pulled the deuce of clubs from his hand, he said, "Clubs--don't you have anything else?" Perdue shook his head.

Pinker threw his remaining cards down on the table. "Shit, you got the rest of mine, then." Kerr, too, laid down his cards; and finally Canard placed his on the pile.

He said, "I'm afraid you get the rest of the hearts, Roy."

"What do you mean, 'afraid'?" said Pinker. He snorted: "Shit. You give me the ass, Canard. The red ass." Then he laughed and, as the other men watched him, leaned back in his chair and stretched. He gave a lazy roar, his head thrown back and his arms out straight, and then stood up.

"I'm tired of playing with you chicken shit fuckers. Ain't none of you got the guts to play like a man." He looked at Perdue. "Except maybe you, and you still ain't figured out what happened to you."

Canard began to gather up the cards. "You're quitting because you don't want to admit you lost the game. What's your score now? It must be well over a hundred."

"Shit." Pinker stretched again. "Think I'll go over to the village--see if maybe I can find your radio shit for you."

Kerr laughed. "If you find any, it'll be because your jo-san took it in trade."

"She best not, if she knows what's good for her. I pay her too god damn much to have her spreading it around on me."

He put on his field jacket and helmet liner and turned to leave. As he was passing through the doorway he stopped, holding the door back against its spring, and said, "If anybody comes looking for me, tell 'em I'm out checking on security." He let go of the door and went out.

It had begun to snow. The snow fell as solid dry crystals from the heavens, sliding down the sky, striking the bare rocks and cold soils of the land. It was slightly brownish-grey in color, much the shade of rock salt, and where it dropped onto the tops of the huts it skipped and sifted off their curved ribbed metal skins and slipped to the ground around them, preserved in drifts unstirred by any winds.

The whole valley became universally the color of the snow, varying solely in lightness and darkness. Even the air was so colored by the snow that the limits of vision were contracted, so that the mountains surrounding the valley faded out of sight and there was no longer a horizon. The distance at which something might be perceived depended mainly upon knowing beforehand just where to look and what to look for, since the snowy air transmitted any distance only essential shapes. Substance, the snow absorbed. After a time, the falling snow became finer in texture, fine powdery crystals, falling slowly, hardly falling at all. Light refracted and reflected by the snow crystals became incoherent, so that, without some falling body to give proof, the air was indistinguishable from the earth.

Lighted windows of the compound appeared as glowing spheres suspended among the snow, appearing or disappearing as lights were turned on or off. When someone opened a door a new globe was created and when he closed the door again it contracted and died out.

## HOW TO BE A SKEPTIC

## A Pose Proem

I don't know why it is, or what, but we skeptics are forever having our convictions tried. Take the matter of coincidence: When I was fourteen and just one of the boys, I was assigned to the school newspaper staff (a scheduling error, no doubt, corrected the next semester), where I met a girl who gushed that she was **moving** to some town I had never heard of; and for a joke I told her that we were **moving** there, too --though of course we weren't-- to the same street, the house next door; I made it all up. And then she **moved**, and I forgot all about her. And then, when I was sixteen, we actually **moved**. You can see it coming, can't you; but I didn't know until that first morning, when my mother woke me to say that the neighbors had a daughter just my age; I opened my eyes and said, as if I had known it all along, "Jayne Otis." Not long ago, my father told me that she had been in love with me, but I don't know; maybe it's true. Eventually, she married the town's drunk.

And again, the **roommate** of a girl bequeathed me by my **roommate** wrote me a letter and--though we had never even met--I responded that I loved her truly. Of course we **married** (and sure enough the other girl **married** and divorced) and our **son** was born the same day and year as my roommate's **son**; and **Carol** my wife was born the same day and year as **Carol** Zupansic, who lived **next door** when I told that first girl who was **moving** so blithely out of town that I was **moving next door** to her. See? It all happened just that way. And so one wonders: does it all signify anything? I rather doubt it, myself.